28 August 2001
English
Original: Spanish

Committee on Conferences
Substantive session of 2001

Draft report

Addendum

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VI. Information technology

A. Re-engineering of the optical disk system

Introduction and overview

1. At its 439th meeting, on 28 August 2001, the Committee considered the report of the Secretary-General on the re-engineering of the optical disk system (A/56/120) and heard an oral introduction with updated information concerning the subject.

2. The optical disk system (ODS) was developed in 1991 and its production operations began in 1992. Since then, technological changes had made the current system obsolete, expensive to maintain and inflexible for growth.

3. In the new ODS (now being called the Official Document System), Windows 2000 and Lotus Notes were used with magnetic media instead of optical disks. Magnetic disks were fast, reliable and inexpensive even for the large amounts of storage space required by the system. The new system was to be delivered in two phases. The first phase, nearly completed, was a one-to-one migration of the system to the new platform; the second would provide for non-Roman language support functions, allowing users to access it and search the documents using any of the six official languages of the United Nations. Phase 2 production operations were expected to start in January 2002.

4. The implications of a purely Web-based system were sweeping. Geographical distance would be irrelevant. Although staff at duty stations would be connected via the Intranet, for outside users, the direct Integrated Service Digital Network (ISDN) connections to ODS would no longer be necessary, since anyone with an Internet connection could potentially have access to it.

5. Currently, ODS was provided free of charge to staff members and Member States and was available to others for a fee. Once it was well-established and tested, the new ODS would have as much capacity as the United Nations web site. Effective immediately, the number of users Governments might register was being increased from 10 to 20.

Discussion

6. The view was expressed that the update provided by the Secretariat was extremely valuable and that the information should be published in an addendum to the report of the Secretary-General. Support was voiced for an increase in the system access quota, and it was suggested that all permanent missions be informed of the change.

7. Replying to the questions raised by the Committee, the representative of the Secretariat stated that it was not clear at what point the new ODS would be made available to the public without limitations. The impact of its usage was being monitored, and restrictions might be relaxed slowly if it were felt that the system could withstand an even larger number of users. Phase 2 parallel operation would begin in December 2001; by January 2002, it should be possible to operate ODS in any one of the six official languages, thanks to Lotus Notes, which had language support for non-Roman languages. The Intranet was by definition internal; hence, there were no plans to make it available to permanent missions. Nevertheless, an "Extranet" was being developed that would allow information to be shared among all United Nations agencies. The Extranet could be accessed by the permanent missions in the future. It was noted that the content of the new ODS was identical to that of the old one.

Conclusions and recommendations

8. The Committee welcomed the information contained in the report of the Secretary-General and the efforts that were being made to bring the optical disk system up to date. It also commended the results of those efforts and the introduction of the new system.

9. The Committee encouraged the Secretary-General to continue those efforts and requested that a report on the progress achieved be issued as an addendum to the report of the Secretary-General (A/56/120) for consideration by the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session.